Impact of Life Coaching on Students : Developing Conscious Leaders of Tomorrow

Synopsis

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Coaching

1.1.1 The field of Coaching

Coaching may be defined as “a theoretically grounded, systematic, goal-directed process designed to facilitate sustained change. It is intended to foster the on-going self-directed learning and personal growth of the coachee” (Grant, 2002).

“Coaching is chiefly about discovery, awareness and choice.” Further, Coaching “is a way of effectively empowering people to find their own answers”, while the Coach plays the role of “encouraging and supporting them on the path as they continue to make important choices” (Kimsey-House et al., 2011).

1.1.2 Coaching vs other Development Interventions

Coaching takes roots in positive psychology and is different from counselling, therapy, teaching, training and mentoring.

Coaching is futuristic while Counseling and Therapy dwell more on the past of the client. Mentoring, Training, Consulting and Therapy adopt the ‘telling’ approach vis-à-vis the ‘asking’ approach in Coaching. Counseling and therapy are interventions adopted for a clinical population and are diagnostic and prescriptive in nature.

In Mentoring and other types of interventions, the relationship of the coach with the coachee is that of an expert-novice while in coaching it is a dyadic equal partnership between them (Griffiths, 2005).

Coaching clients are functional, adapted individuals themselves wanting to progress in one or more part of their life (Kemp T., 2005). They are whole, resourceful and creative individuals (Cavanagh, 2005). Coaching works with the belief that the client or the coachee is an expert in his life. Hence coaching engages individuals in collaborative, coactive conversations, which is so different from the usual authoritarian, superior-inferior experiences (Kimsey-House et al., 2011) that stem from other types of relationships.

Life coaching is a professional relationship that has been shown to improve several aspects of one's life, which include enhanced well-being, accomplishing goals, alignment with values, strengths, and purpose, overcoming challenges, and effectively managing change. (Govindji & Linley, 2007; Grant, 2003; Linley, Nielsen, Gillett, & Biswas-Diener, 2010; Tofade, 2010).

When students are in college and are struggling with career decisions, personal fulfilment, and/or educational and social complexities, life coaching can offer a chance to overcome obstacles and thrive in all of these areas.

1.1.3 Impact of Coaching at workplace and otherwise

Coaching has taken many forms – team coaching, executive coaching, leadership coaching at workplace and life coaching otherwise.

As stated above, coaching comes in a variety of styles and settings, including the workplace and higher education. Life coaching goals vary greatly, but can include enhanced self-awareness, a greater sense of well-being, decreased stress levels, greater self-confidence, more effective communication, and better problem-solving skills (Griffiths, 2005). Life coaching can also be at a time when the participants focus on making career choices as well as when they try to figure out how their personal strengths and values relate to their future career.

Globally, the field of coaching is evolving and gaining considerable ground especially in the organizational setting. This study is an effort to understand its relevance and impact in academia so that students may gain from this progressive practice.

Though the pandemic may put budgetary constraints on these kind of development programs but there is sufficient and definite evidence to show the effectiveness of coaching which could improve graduate and postgraduate career outcomes, help students achieve their personal goals, and increase their fulfilment levels with their respective courses (Ross et al., 2021). Coaching will hence be able to get definitive gains for students both in their academic achievements and in career pursuits.

Additionally, at this phase in their academic journey, students typically struggle with the dissonance of wanting coaching services while thinking they should not need them while enrolled in an advanced degree program, owing to the stigma around counselling and therapy services. Thus, services that are currently available to these individuals may not be openly utilized. It is therefore of utmost importance that this population gets aware of coaching as a service and the philosophy behind it and it gets accessible to them in order to be able to achieve their personal and professional goals. It is important that individuals who choose not to use coaching see it as ‘missing out’ on a professional development opportunity, rather than the current misguided belief that coachees require assistance and are thus

‘missing something’ in themselves.

Because this population is the hiring ground for future administrators, executives, staff and faculty, a robust and open coaching offered in this area is an opportunity to help them bring out their best performance while also laying the groundwork for a coaching culture within the college.

Taking advantage of various professional development opportunities, particularly those provided by coaches, can even provide administrators, staff, and faculty with new opportunities to explore possibilities, overcome fears and misconceptions, and reaffirm the value they bring to the academy and the university (Garvey & Megginson, 2018).

The popularity of coaching as a development activity in organizations has outpaced the research. To inspire research and strengthen their intellectual foundation, the Thought Leadership Institute’s (TLI), research looks at how the future of work, education, social policy, and planetary ecology will affect and be affected by coaching. The goal is to achieve positive outcomes for individuals, organisations, and communities worldwide in accordance with the United Nations Action Plan for societal well-being. (UN General Assembly, 2015).

1.2 Conscious Leaders

Self-awareness, Emotional Intelligence and Value-based decision-making are the founding pillars of Conscious Leadership. These clubbed with the characteristics of coachability complete the definition of a Conscious Leader.

There is no concrete, agreed-upon definition of Conscious Leadership yet. Some definitions from certain articles and websites have been stated here. Conscious leadership is defined as guiding others while being fully aware of oneself, as well as cultivating growth in organisations through the support of their people. A conscious leader embodies the inclusive 'we' approach rather than the ego-centric 'me' attitude. (Campbell K., 2022). Conscious leaders are self-awareness masters who practise mindfulness on a daily basis. This allows them to regulate their emotions and, as a result, they do not have kneejerk reactions or the need to defend themselves when the stimulus appears. Instead, they own up to their mistakes, solicit feedback to identify areas for improvement, and make decisions that serve to bring the teams together.

Conscious leaders speak with integrity, lead with authenticity, and hold themselves accountable. They

listen to understand rather than respond, and they do so by being in tune with themselves and their surroundings. (Dethmer, 2018)

The great Management Guru Peter F. Drucker has many a times been quoted about achieving true leadership excellence that one should cultivate a deep understanding of oneself, how he learns, how he works with others, what his values are and where can he make the greatest contribution. In other words, he talks about the importance of being self-aware and how it is the cornerstone for leadership excellence. The 75 principles of Conscious Leadership (M.A. M.B.A., 2008) are built around the 3 variables of self-awareness, EI and value-alignment.

Self-awareness, EI and authenticity being at the base of Conscious Leadership, this study works around and measures self-awareness, emotional intelligence and value-alignment as the outcomes of coaching – the perfect ingredients for Conscious Leadership.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As life coaching has grown in popularity, there has been increased research interest and the number of empirical research studies validating its efficacy in various populations and areas – work, executive, leadership and life.

One group program documented those individuals receiving coaching self-reported in "improvements in their mental health and resilience, self-awareness, skill acquisition, developed an ability to shift perspectives, a sense of community and support" (Patphol, 2018; Fried & Atkins, 2019).

The researcher found very few studies done to understand the impact of coaching on students; most of them being around improving their academic performance and wellbeing.

A study named *The Effectiveness of Student Coaching in Community Colleges published in Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, studied the impact of coaching on the academic achievement of students and found that the academic outcome of students who enrolled for and underwent coaching was significantly higher than that of the control group. The study also showed positive corelation between intensity of coaching (number of sessions) and academic grades (Rodriguez Ott et al., 2019).

Life coaching research has confirmed multiple positive outcomes for overstressed university students (Fried & Irwin, 2016)

Coaching also helped undergraduate students in dealing with stress (Short, Kinman, and

Baker, 2010; Fried and Irwin, 2016).

Coaching had a significant positive impact on students with disabilities pursuing degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Bellman, Burgstahler, and Hinke, 2015).

Many students report procrastinating on assignments that must be completed. Academic performance has been shown to suffer as a result of procrastination. Coaching has been found to have the potential to reduce procrastination and increase student productivity (Sims, 2014; Dyson & Torbrand, 2015).

A study published in The Journal of Positive Psychology, titled *"Does coaching work? A meta-analysis on the effects of coaching on individual level outcomes in an organizational context"* measured the impact of coaching on 5 outcomes – performance, skills, wellbeing, coping, work attitudes and goal-directed self-regulation. The results show positive outcomes in all aspects measured in the organizational context (Theeboom et al., 2013).

Managing better overall mental health and dealing effectively with stress and anxiety can lead to improved academic performance (Bevine, Meyers, & Houssemand, 2013).

According to one study, coaching with female senior high school students resulted in increased optimism while decreasing symptoms of depression and anxiety (Green & Norrish, 2013). Another study discovered that coaching elementary school children improved their hope and participation (Waters, 2011).

More research on the efficacy of life coaching is required to increase the credibility of the process of life coaching (Grant, 2003; Short, Kinman, & Baker, 2010).

It appears that the well-being associated with goal achievement and psychological need fulfilment may act as an emotional and cognitive reinforcer, leading to greater goal achievement in the longer term (Linley, Nielsen, Gillett, & Biswas-Diener, 2010).

Coaching can assist students in managing their stress and anxiety while also promoting personal growth (Short et al., 2010).

Coaching can also assist individuals in clarifying and achieving their career objectives (Tofade, 2010).

Life coaching increased college student success by fostering self-determination, according to Boutelle and Parker (2009) and Buchanan (2011), who conducted research on college students with learning disabilities and ADHD. Life coaching can assist students with ADHD in their academic performance by

helping them with establishing goals for skills such as time management and priority setting. A specific study conducted with autistic college students, discovered that life coaching positively shaped their emerging sense of self-worth and aided in achievement of goals (Geller and Greenbergh, 2009).

Life coaching has also been shown to foster a growth mindset, which has been linked to educational achievement and increased persistence (Franklin & Doran, 2009).

Several studies have found that life coaching has a positive effect on student success parameters. Life coaching, for example, has a positive impact on educational self-efficacy, which is the strongest predictor of academic success (Franklin & Doran, 2009). None of these studies however have a future role focus of students.

Life coaching has been shown to produce specific positive outcomes, such as increased self-awareness and insight, as well as increased well-being and quality of life. It was observed that life coaching improved mental health and life satisfaction in individuals, despite the fact that trying to improve mental health was not the direct objective of the life coaching process (Grant 2003).

Life coaching has also been found to help with goal attainment (Grant, 2003) and to have a positive effect on one's overall optimism, which in-turn may be related to goal attainment (Green et al., 2006). The positive outcomes of life coaching have the potential to have a long-term impact on an individual's life and, if sustained, can aid in the pursuit of a higher quality of life (Griffiths, 2005).

Empirical research with specific populations of college students has been done, which helps to demonstrate the effectiveness of life coaching. The success of life coaching as an intervention has been studied in a variety of populations, including those on the autism spectrum and those with ADHD. Students reported that coaching assisted them in achieving a wide range of educational and personal goals, such as improved goal setting, greater confidence, and a more directed and organised career search. Students reported learning specific life skills such as time management, organisational skills, and goal setting through coaching. Despite the fact that life coaching is not oriented towards mental health, studies have shown that it improves psychological health functioning. Grant (2003) conducted a study with 20 postgraduate students and discovered that not only did goal attainment increase after life coaching, but also there resulted a significant drop in depression, anxiety, and stress. Based on this research, life coaching may have a positive impact on the mental health of college students who are

dealing with a variety of stressors.

3. NEED OF THE STUDY

Coaching has wide-ranging impact on the holistic development of individuals – within and outside organizations. As it is its impact has far outreached the research. Most of the limited research and empirical studies on Coaching and its effects have been in the organizational setting and hence there's a huge gap and dearth of data for its impact on college students.

Research on impact of non-academic support to students – mentoring, advising and especially coaching - has been extremely limited. In the academic setting, there is very little evidence available on the effectiveness of bringing coaching into the development plan of graduate students. The researcher could not find any study done in India on the impact of coaching in academia. This study will flourish the entry of coaching on campuses of higher education.

Most of the empirical studies, on the impact of coaching, have used the self-reporting format to measure progress of the participants. Hence there is need of a study that measures coaching outcomes in more concrete terms. This study proposes to use a combination of outcome measures including assessment of mediator variables viz., attainment of goals, sense of well-being, satisfaction with life, life purpose, health outcomes, behavior or competency change, improvement in quality of relationships, performance improvement, etc.

Also, earlier studies have measured outcomes of self-awareness, EI and values separately. This study tries to integrate them into a model of Conscious Leadership where coaching helps in fostering all of these together towards the development of a conscious leader.

An assessment of Coachability and its role in the prediction of the outcome of coaching is also not attempted yet in earlier studies. Coachability will act as a moderator variable in the present study.

There is no agreed-upon concrete definition of Conscious Leadership, which still remains an abstract concept. This study will also attempt to provide a clear definition of Conscious Leadership in terms of coachability, self-awareness, EI and value-alignment. The mediator and moderator variables and their contribution to the DVs and to conscious leadership will also be studied. The present study will also attempt to bring out a clear definition of Conscious Leadership in terms of the 4 variables.

Most professional coaches are working with executives in organizations. The researcher holds an

international ICF *ACC Coach* Certification and is a Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Centred Coaching Certified *Leadership and Team Coach*. Having positive outcomes with executives in the corporate, she proposes to modify the one-on-one and team coaching model into a blended group and individual model in academia to make the study feasible. Having interacted with educators and students while conducting classes and workshops (corporate etiquette, resume-writing, goal-direction, etc.) the researcher found a huge gap in thought-clarity, decision-making skills and self-awareness in students of undergraduate and postgraduate courses alike and identified the need for coaching, firsthand. Stress, anxiety and restlessness were perceived in the students. Emotional Intelligence also emerged as a gap area which will require sufficient work to be done with the students in the form of group and one-on-one sessions for establishing clear goals, value-alignment and identifying clear action steps alongwith building accountability to stakeholders in the process, so that the actions get integrated with performance, achievement and other positive outcomes.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To study the relationship between Self-awareness and Emotional Intelligence among students.
2. To study the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Value-alignment among students.
3. To study the relationship between Self-awareness and Value-alignment among students.
4. To study the difference in pre and post measures of Self-awareness of students
5. To study the difference in pre and post measures of Emotional Intelligence of students
6. To study the difference in pre and post measures of Value Alignment of students
7. To study the role of Coachability as a moderator variable in predicting Coaching outcomes.
8. To propose a model of Conscious Leadership viz., self-awareness, Emotional Intelligence and Value-alignment and Coachability.

5. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The research study will be undertaken in order to test the following hypotheses. These hypotheses are formed based on previous studies and literature.

1. Hypothesis 1 : There is a significant relationship between Self-awareness and Emotional Intelligence among students.
2. Hypothesis 2 : There is a significant relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Value-

alignment among students.

3. Hypothesis 3 H0 : There is a significant relationship between Self-awareness and Value-alignment among students.
4. Hypothesis 4 H1 : There will be a significant difference in pre and post measures of Self-awareness of students.
5. Hypothesis 5 H1 : There will be a significant difference in pre and post measures of Emotional Intelligence of students.
6. Hypothesis 6 H1 : There will be a significant difference in pre and post measures of Value Alignment of students.
7. Hypothesis 7 : Coachability will have a moderating effect on Coaching outcomes.

6. OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED RESEARCH

6.1Scope of Study

An in-depth study will be conducted with 1st year MBA students of DEI. The participants will be closely assessed even as they enter the industry during their training and final placement.

6.2Research Design

'Pre and Post Test' experimental research design will be used to study the impact of coaching in students on the variables selected.

6.3 Sample composition

An orientation on coaching will be given to the students. A sample size of 200 students will be administered the pretest on values. Their Coachability Index will then be assessed and based on the results, a sample of 30 students will be selected by randomization. Since the intervention is intensive, a sample size of 30 will be taken to keep the number manageable and feasible.

6.4 Sampling Technique

Purposive Sampling Method will be used to draw relevant samples from the population for the study.

6.5 Tools and Statistical Analysis

Self-constructed tests for Coachability and Self-awareness will be used after testing for their validity and reliability.

Standardized test using the Emotional Intelligence Scale for measuring Emotional Intelligence will be

used.

A PVQ-RR (Schwartz, 2021) is being considered for measuring value alignment. The Portrait Values Questionnaire is based on Schwartz's theory of values (as discussed above).

Relationship among the moderator variable and 3 dependent variables – Self-awareness, EI and Value-alignment will be assessed, using Coefficient of Correlation.

Significant difference between scores of pre and post measure will be tested by "Wilcoxon sign rank test" after the coaching intervention (Post-test).

6.6 Procedure

Phase I – Administering of Values instrument and measuring the coachability index of the 200 students.

Phase II – Selection of a sample size of 30 students based on their values and Coachability Index.

Phase III – Providing intervention of Life Coaching (Group and One-on-one coaching) – 8 coaching sessions per participant, over a 12 month period (with ongoing follow-ups)

Phase IV – Post-assessments on self-awareness, EI and Value alignment of the 30 participants.

7. PROPOSED CHAPTERIZATION

The structure of proposed research will be as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Interpretation

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

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